

News from Ed Markey

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MARKEY: GOP MEDICARE BILL A POISON PILL FOR AMERICA'S SENIORS

Washington, D.C.: Rep. Edward Markey (D-MA), a senior member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, decried the President's signing today of the Medicare Bill pushed through Congress in the dead of night two weeks ago.

Rep. Markey said, "This bill is not the elixir for saving Medicare; it is, rather, a poison pill that leads to the destruction of the Medicare program as John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson envisioned it. This bill was crafted of the special interests, by the special interests, and for the special interests, and should not stand."

The bill signed by President Bush today was passed in the House of Representatives on November 22 by a vote of 220-215, after GOP leaders refused to end a 15-minute vote, instead holding the vote open for an unprecedented three hours to allow time for the Republican leadership and the White House to twist the arms of House Republicans and get them to switch their vote to support for the bill.

Rep. Markey joined other House Democrats today in introducing a measure that would repeal one of the most egregious provisions signed by President Bush today – the provision that prohibits Medicare from using its immense bargaining clout to reduce prescription prices.

"The President is signing a law which specifically denies to seniors the reduction in prescription drug prices that would follow if Medicare were permitted to use the collective buying power of millions of seniors to get the best price in the marketplace," said Rep. Markey. "Such a simple solution to soaring drug prices would be so effective that the Big Drug Lobby demanded that the Republicans outlaw such negotiations, and, shamefully, the Republican Party went along with this ultimatum. Without such a check on soaring drug prices, the entire scheme is doomed."

"The Republican prescription drug plan fails millions of America's seniors," Rep. Markey said. "Even though the Republican bill requires seniors to pay premiums year-round, its \$2,850 gap in coverage hurts the middle class and leaves many seniors without coverage for part of the year."

The Republican Medicare bill will take effect in 2006 and prohibits Medicare from negotiating lower drug prices, a method that save Veterans Affairs 90% on drug prices, and blocks re-importation of drugs from other countries. The Congressional Budget Office has determined that in Massachusetts alone, 60,000 senior citizens will lose their retiree health benefits, 185,000 Medicaid beneficiaries will pay more for prescription drugs and 77,000 fewer seniors will qualify for low-income coverable because of new stricter asset testing. This translates into 2.7 million seniors nationwide who will lose their retiree prescription drug coverage; up to 6.4 million of the poorest Medicare beneficiaries will get less drug coverage than they have now; and millions of seniors will see their Medicare premiums rise if they refuse to give up their doctor and join an HMO.

"This Republican Medicare bill puts profits before prescriptions; it puts corporations before care; and it puts health care CEO's before America's seniors," Rep. Markey concluded.

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